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ABSTRACT

In order to respond to the recent nation-wide changes in student characteristics and enrollment patterns in community junior colleges, institutions must offer evening off-campus programs to meet the academic and motivational needs of a student population which is older, married, employed full-time, and enrolled part-time. Only 52 percent of 1972's more than nine million college students were in the 18 to 21 age group, while part-time students presently account for over half of all community junior college enrollments. A questionnaire survey of 349 students in Polk Community College's (Florida) evening off-campus program indicated that most students were over 23 years of age and one-quarter were over 30. Most students planned to complete an Associate Degree, preferred the convenience of off-campus rather than on-campus courses, and were able to attend only in the evenings. Students were most interested in occupational courses. The necessities of a successful evening off-campus program are: (1) the program should include ethnic participation representative of the community; (2) classes should be scheduled according to student needs; (3) the off-campus evening program should advertise to recruit students through radio, television, newspapers, etc. (JC)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTENSION CENTER STUDENTS AT THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

BY

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Recently community junior colleges have experienced a significant shift in student enrollment patterns. For example, many institutions have: (1) not enrolled the increasing student numbers typical of earlier periods; (2) noted increased student interest in occupational and vocational career education; and (3) reported a decline in their college transfer enrollments. While student enrollment patterns have changed, so have the students. The traditional full-time student recently graduated from high school has been joined by others that are older, married, employed full-time, and enrolled part-time, particularly in the evening hours. Many institutions and departments of social science have responded to these trends by locating off-campus and offering an extensive evening course program. The first part of this paper will examine these national trends in student characteristics and enrollment patterns. The second part will present data collected from evening, off-campus students, at a particular community college, to determine whether the students' motivational and academic needs were being met.

The function, purpose and philosophy of the community junior college is to meet the academic and motivational needs of the student population it serves. While offering evening off-campus programs and courses is entirely consistent with these objectives, there is limited information available concerning evening off-campus programs and the type of student enrolled. Medsher and Tillery, for example, noting that many

students attending the community junior college are older than the usual high school graduate, conclude that more information is needed to successfully meet their academic and motivation needs. "More than any other institution, the community college seems destined to become the most significant medium for continuing education--the educational center in its local community--but it will need data about its clients in order to do its job well."[1]

Limited as the data is regarding evening off-campus programs and the characteristics of enrolled students, some authorities believe they represent an excellent opportunity for increasing future enrollments. According to Bushnell, for instance, curriculum planning for "non-traditional," older, and part-time students is especially important for the community junior college because "those over 21, many married and working full time--may well account for much of the enrollment increase within public community colleges during this decade." Noting that the age group between 20 and 34 will show the most dramatic increases during this period, Bushnell continues:

> Those falling into these age brackets, we predict, represent the most significant enrollment growth potential for community colleges precisely because of their need for occupational preparation and re-training. The upward shift in the average age of full-and-part-time students already reflects a move in this direction. Accomodating the needs and expectations of an older, more self-directed, and more highly motivated student body will require major adjustments in teaching methods, faculty attitudes, course scheduling, organization and prerequisites for enrollment - in short, in all those courses, procedures, and traditional practices which were geared to the youthful expectations of the traditional (19-20-year-old) college-age student.[2]

A similar projection has been made by the Committee on Higher Adult Education of the American Council on Education which:

> believes that the absolute numbers of students carrying adult responsibilities will increase substantially in the next decade and that their proportion among all students will be greater than it is today. Higher education must respond to this shift in the characteristics of the student population.[3]

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education reports the trend toward older, part-time students will continue toward the year 2000, assuming that approximately 50 percent of the "college-age" population are enrolled. For the community junior college, this will mean that (1) off-campus instruction of adults may become the most rapidly expanding and rapidly changing segment of post-secondary education; and (2) fewer students may study on campus, and more may elect to pursue their studies off-campus and get credit by examination.[4]

The evidence suggests the trend toward older students is already well established; only 52 percent of 1972's more than nine million college students were in the 18-to-21-year-old age group.[5] Also well established is the trend toward part-time enrollments. For instance, part-time students presently account for over half of all community junior college enrollments, and in some institutions, part-time enrollments are more than twice as large as full-time enrollments.[6]

> Statistics of community junior college part-time enrollments indicate that there has been a substantial increase in the number of employed adults who intend to earn the associate degree through part-time study. As a result of this increase more emphasis is being placed on organized patterns of evening courses which parallel the courses required of full-time students.[7]

The experience of Florida has been typical of many states. In 1968 when the State had a total full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment of 77,000, according to Henderson, an FTE of 125,000 was projected for the 1973-74 school year. Actually, the:

> FTE exceeded that estimate by approximately 5,000. What was dramatic, however, was that the 130,000 FTE was generated not from 225,000 individuals as projected in 1968, but from over 475,000 different individuals. Our students clearly had become a more heterogeneous group consisting largely of older and part-time students, rather than full-time students directly out of high school. Not only were more part-time students being served, but more than ever before were studying in occupational fields, compensatory education, and community services education. Occupational enrollments reached 38% of our total headcount last year, up from 25% in 1967-68.[8]

While many adults want to continue their education beyond high school, higher educational institutions must modify their traditional means of providing instruction if the public's needs are to be met. This conclusion is supported by a market survey of upper division colleges in California which also found that:

> Only one person in three who is interested in continuing his education is willing to come to a college campus during the summer for classes. While four out of five would find evening classes acceptable, they want such classes held near their own homes. Only one in two is willing to go to a college campus for night classes. One of our off-campus programs is located within a few minutes of the campus, both the program and the entrance requirements are the same. But seven out of the ten of those who have enrolled have never applied for admission to the on-campus program.[9]

The national image of the typical college student has

changed dramatically in the past two decades. Higher education increasingly has attracted more females, more blacks, and more older students. More students are employed full-time and attend college part-time. The community junior college must offer evening and off-campus courses to be consistent with its philosophy and purpose of meeting the academic and motivational needs of the student population it serves.

After two years of operation, data was collected which sought to measure how successful the evening off-campus curriculum at Polk Community College was in meeting the students' motivational and academic needs. A 27 item questionnaire was devised to survey characteristics and attitudes, and was administered to 349 students enrolled in 34 credit courses at four satellite centers. The following student characteristics and attitudes were among those identified:

1. Most students plan on completing the Associate Degree.
2. Most are over 23 years of age and one-quarter are over 30.
3. Most can attend classes only in the evening because of family or job responsibilities.
4. Most would not enroll in classes meeting on Saturday.
5. Most have enrolled on-campus but prefer the convenience, typically smaller class sizes, and familiar surroundings of off-campus courses.
6. Having attended off-campus courses does not increase- or decrease- the likelihood students will enroll on-campus.
7. Cancelling off-campus courses because of insufficient enrollment would not discourage students from enrolling in future off-campus courses.
8. If an off-campus course is cancelled, students would enroll either on-campus or in another course at the same off-campus center.

9. Students are most interested in courses in the Occupational or Vocational areas, followed by Social Science, Mathematics, or Humanities, and finally in the Natural Science or Communications areas.

The student survey indicated other necessities if an evening off-campus program is to successfully meet the post secondary educational needs of the community it serves.

1. To be consistent with the open door philosophy, a successful off-campus program should include ethnic participation representative of the community served. In this instance, over 85 percent of all off-campus students were found to be white, while under 10 percent were black. Because the local black population is nearly 20 percent, more emphasis on recruiting blacks to attend the institution is needed.

2. A significant administrative difficulty is scheduling off-campus classes most likely to meet student needs and attract sufficient enrollments. Previous experience often serves as a guide. An additional approach is surveying presently enrolled students to determine which courses should be offered the following term. Registration entirely by mail would then be possible. Variation in course offerings is necessary. Courses beyond the introductory level should be offered and scheduling the same course repeatedly should be avoided. Student responses indicated no preference concerning which term in the year they are most likely to enroll in off-campus courses.

3. Establishing a strong off-campus evening program requires community awareness of the courses offered, that counseling is available, and that registration procedures are uncomplicated. Institutional contact with the public through a wide variety of approaches should emphasize this. Recruitment should be a function of faculy, administration, and especially the staff: an often overlooked but important factor is informed switchboard operators and receptionists. Advertising informing the public tailored to the region's particular geographic population characteristics is necessary.

   --Radio and television stations, and newspapers and newsletters, should all be encouraged to publicize off-campus courses. Some colleges finance printing the entire semester schedule in the newspaper, including enrollment forms to cut-out and mail in. Large, concentrated, urban populations may be best informed by this method.

--Local banking institutions, in some instances, have mailed course schedules with the monthly statement.

--Faculty participants in a speaker's bureau program could distribute course schedules and discuss available programs at public gatherings.

--Institutionally produced films, color slides, or tape recordings, which could be presented to community groups are other means of providing public information.

--Finally, it is important that the off-campus schedule of classes be planned well in advance to permit sufficient advertisement.

Community junior college students have typically come from many backgrounds, have varying personal abilities, and seek to fulfill many different purposes. A survey of the literature concerning national enrollment trends in the future indicates a "new" student population increasingly will attend the community junior college. Part-time enrollments will increase substantially while full-time student numbers will not increase as they have in the past decade. These part-time students will be older, married, and employed full-time. Many will only be able to attend during the evening hours and many others will prefer enrolling in off-campus centers closer to their homes instead of attending the central campus. This evidence suggests community junior colleges and departments of social science must make an extensive long-term commitment to increasing evening course offerings generally and particularly in the off-campus centers. The implications for the curriculum, instruction, student personnel services, physical facilities, and a wide range of other matters, are obvious if the open-door is to be more that mere rhetoric.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Leland L. Medsker and Dale Tillery, Breaking the Access Barrier: A Profile of Two Year Colleges (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 49.

[2]David S. Bushnell, Organizing for Change: New Priorities for Community Colleges (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1973), p. 116.

[3]American Council on Education: Higher Education and the Adult Student (Washington, D.C.: A.E.C. Special Report, October 25, 1972), p. 2.

[4]The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education: The Fourth Revolution: Instructional Technology in Higher Education (Highstown, N.J.: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1972).

[5]Southern Regional Education Board, News of Higher Education in the South, Taking the "Higher" Out of Higher Ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional Education Board, September, 1973, p. 1).

[6]1973 Junior College Directory.

[7]James W. Thornton, Jr. The Community Junior College (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1972), pp. 248-9.

[8]Lee J. Henderson, "Plug-in," Official Newsletter of the Florida Association of Community Colleges, VII(September, 1974), p. 5.

[9]Thomas H. McGrath, Address delivered at the National Association of Summer Sessions, St. Louis, Mo., November 14, 1972. Reported in Higher Education and National Affairs, November 17, 1972, Vol. XXI, No. 44, p. 3.

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